

The Butterfly and the Mantis

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Summary:

Richie Tozier is a sex addict. After recently breaking up with his boyfriend for cheating, he decides to go to therapy to sort things out. Then he sleeps with his therapist.

Therapist AU Bichie fic, both are 25+ years old, warning for mentions of sexual assault and homophobia.

1. Iridescent Wings

Author's Note:

Technically co-authored by @skatedaddy aka literally Richie Tozier

This is a prologue, gonna be a long one bc it's practice to get back into writing so it's a trashy unrealistic AU that's easy and fun to write. But. Don't want to spoil anything, have fun with that Richie.

"I'm a huge cumslut," Richie said, looking downwards and blushing slightly. Bill stared at him blankly.

"How long have you thought about yourself that way?" Bill replied, shifting in the chair he sat in and looking into Richie's eyes, to which Richie looked away.

"Is that an actual question you're asking?" Richie said, looking up and into Bill's eyes, noting their coldness.

"I'm afraid it is," Bill replied, his voice monotone. "If I'm to get to the heart of your dysfunction, I have to understand how you view yourself."

"I'm a piece of shit," Richie said, and Bill narrowed his eyes, looking away from his patient.

"But why?" Bill asked, shifting in his chair.

"A lot of it has to do with me sleeping with just about everyone, I would say," Richie said, looking away again

"Do you feel a need to sleep with people?" Bill asked, jotting down observations about his client on a notepad.

"Usually – I mean, it's fun unless they're really ugly. I mean, if they're ugly but really rich I might make an exception – I mean, cock is cock, am I right?" Richie said, talking fast and looking at Bill, in contrast to his previously shy appearance.

"Why is..." Bill thought how to phrase his question. "Cock important to you?"

"Have you ever had a dick inside you? It's amazing," Richie said, grinning amusedly.

"A sex life is healthy for any adult but what you're talking about seems a little bit over the top," Bill said, looking into Richie's eyes as he spoke.

"Maybe that's part of my problem. I can't have enough sex. It's, like, my reason for living," Richie said, his tone suddenly less manic.

"That doesn't sound healthy. Obviously you want to change, or you wouldn't have come here," Bill replied, crossing his legs and reaching for a water bottle on his desk.

"Well. I kind of cheated on my boyfriend, like, a billion times. and he found out. I feel pretty shitty about it, I guess," Richie said, avoiding Bill's gaze.

"How long had you been in a relationship?" Bill asked, looking away and taking a sip of water.

"Two years," Richie replied, voice soft.

"How did it feel for him to end the relationship?" Bill asked, taking notes down.

"He was hurt by me, I guess. He probably knew he was going to be better off without me. He was mad. I feel bad about it, because I know it's wrong to cheat, but I couldn't stop, and now he thinks I'm a huge whore, and he's not even wrong. He was gonna propose to me," Richie said, whispering the last part.

"How did that feel?" Bill asked, continuing to write down information about Richie.

"How do you think it felt? Horrible. Gross. Like it was a fucking sign that I don't deserve to be happy," Richie said, voice growing louder, and Bill observed Richie's right hand curling into a tight fist.

“What's your everyday routine?” Bill asked, changing the subject.

“Well, three days a week I have an internship at this high end fashion company. My parents pay for my apartment cause it doesn't pay me anything, but I'm sucking my bosses dick, so there's that. And a few other people, but you know. So I do that, and on my days off I like to do mdma and get boned and watch tv naked,” Richie said, looking upwards as if he was trying to recall what he did all day.

“Do you exercise or have any hobbies besides sex?” Bill asked.

“I design clothes, read, and watch tv,” Richie replied, looking down

“What do you read?” Bill asked, looking into his eyes.

“A little bit of everything, you know. A lot of books on philosophy. Taoism. I've also read the Kama Sutra, like, a bunch of times,” Richie said.

“What are you afraid of?” Bill asked, getting ready to take down notes.

“The usual stuff. Rejection. Spiders. Guns. But guns are kind of hot at the same time,” Richie said, counting them on his right hand.

“Have you ever been rejected?” Bill asked, looking down at his notepad.

“Not usually. A couple times,” Richie said, looking down as well.

“If you wouldn't mind, could you tell me about the worst experience with rejection you've had?” Bill asked, paying attention to Richie's shoulders.

“Um. Well, the last time it happened, I thought I was really vibing with this temp at my work, and he felt me up in an elevator, which was cool, but when he found out I was sleeping with my boss too he refused to sleep with me. He said he'd probably catch something, which is bullshit, because I'm clean,” Richie said, back stiffening and looking flustered

“You avoided my question,” Bill said, his voice accidentally sounding

extra accusatory.

"I don't want to talk about it. Ask something else," Richie replied, looking avoiding Bill's eyes.

"I'll come back to it, but remember that I'm here to help you. Anything you say will be kept confidential and judgment free. How many times a week do you have sex?" Bill asked, cracking his knuckles before beginning to write again.

"Yeah, like a nerd like you could judge me anyway. And I would say probably around twenty to thirty? Sometimes more? Like five times a day average," Richie answered, scratching his head.

"Do you think you could try reducing that number by 1 daily?" Bill asked.

"...I mean, I guess. That wouldn't be so hard. Just by one. Unless I mean someone really cute. Like, red heads. With blue eyes," Richie said, looking away in thought.

"If you can at least try to do that, I think I can help you," Bill said, voice reassuring.

"I'll try my best," Richie said, smiling at Bill.

"I'd like you to call me once a day and tell me how many people you've slept with and who they were," Bill said, a hint of a blush on his cheeks.

"That seems pretty intimate, don't you think? Why do you want to know?" Richie asked, narrowing his eyes at Bill.

"I want to understand why you sleep with them so I can get to the heart of your sex addiction," Bill said, matter-of-factly.

"...Well, I guess that's fine. Do you think I'm sick? Whats wrong with me?" Richie probed.

"I think you have a mix of histrionic and borderline personality disorder. You're not sick, you're just not in the place in life you should be, frankly. If you'd let me, I want to help you cope with your

attention-craving tendencies and live a more fulfilling life,” Bill said, handing Richie a trifold pamphlet titled So Sou Have Borderline Personality Disorder.

“So you can fix me?” Richie said, taking the pamphlet and skimming it.

“I can help you fix yourself,” Bill replied.

“Because I've recently seen Forrest Gump and I don't wanna end up like that,” richie said, a bit paranoid.

“As long as you use PreP you should have nothing to worry about,” Bill assured him.

“PreP?” Richie asked, confused.

“The hiv prevention pill?” Bill replied, equally confused.

“Uh, is that something I should be using?” Richie asked, eyes widening.

“Definitely. I can get my psychiatrist friend to give you a referral, just go down the hall after our session and knock on Mike Hanlon's door,” Bill stated, looking down at his notes

“I guess thats probably not a bad idea, because I really don't use condoms,” Richie said, looking away absentmindedly.

“Change of plan, you're coming with me,” Bill said, eyes hardening as he put down his notepad and pulled his phone out of his pants pocket.

“What?” Richie asked, confused.

“For your own safety, i'd like you to come stay with me for a week or so, or as long as it takes to help you find healthy coping habits,” Bill said, texting quickly while he spoke.

“For my own safety? Since when am I in danger?” Richie asked, eyes widening.

"I believe you're putting yourself at great risk by having unprotected sex," Bill said, distractingly looking down as he started to cancel appointments.

"It feels better that way. And I always ask if they're clean! I get tested, like, one a week," Richie said, narrowing his eyes at Bill, voice quivering.

"Although that makes me feel relieved, I still implore you to voluntarily stop having sex for the time being," Bill said, dropping his phone on the adjacent desk and looking up at Richie.

"Like altogether? No. No way. Not happening," Richie said defiantly.

"I'm worried that it could be any day now that you hurt yourself. What about a compromise?" Bill replied, sighing.

"I can't just stop having sex. Like, physically, I just can't. I don't know why you would ask me that. Why would you want me to be unhappy. What kind of compromise?" Richie said, breathing heavily.

"If you keep up this self-destructive cycle you'll never be happier than you are now," Bill said, voice grim.

"I'm not giving up sex," Richie stated, his voice resistant.

"If you voluntarily submit yourself to daily routine building exercises and psychotherapy, I'll... fulfill your other needs," Bill said, looking away from his client.

"Um, what exactly are you proposing?" Richie asked, even more confused than before.

"To help you get your life back together," Bill replied, still looking away.

"And what are these other needs you're going to fulfill?" Richie asked, eyes narrowing at his psychologist.

"Whatever you feel is necessary," Bill said, looking into Richie's eyes and catching him by surprise.

“....are you saying you'd bang me?” Richie asked, astonished.

“I'm saying that if you've physically unable to go without sex, having safe sex with someone who is guaranteed to not be a safety hazard is safer than letting you pick up random guys,” Bill said, rationalizing what he had proposed.

“And what makes you think just you can satisfy me? Aren't you kind of a nerd?” Richie asked, amused, looking Bill over.

“I assure you that I am a fully capable of... it,” Bill replied, looking away

“Are you sure science bitch? Because I'm kind of a lot to handle,” Richie said, smirking.

“How is that?” Bill, fighting the urge to smirk himself.

“I like to do it a lot – I like it rough,” Richie said, looking away and blushing.

“Although i have little interest in sex, I have a fully functioning libido and have had sex for hours before,” Bill stated, voice monotone.

“Do you want a trophy? I dunno. you'd be committing to a lot.and even then. I couldn't even stay faithful to my boyfriend,” Richie said, looking away in thought.

“In this scenario you'd be secluded, spending all your time on personal development. And with all due respect, I'm not your boyfriend,” Bill replied, voice still monotone.

“So you want to lock me up and bang me all day? Like a sex slave? Is that legal?” Richie asked quizzically.

“You wouldn't be locked up at all - rather, I would take you up north to a compound for you to get away from social distractions to focus on yourself,” Bill said, picking up his phone again.

“Are you talking like a house? A facility? a warehouse?” Richie asked, looking at his therapist with confused eyes.

"I have house a few hours away in the middle of the woods but 30 minutes away from a town. I've done this a few times before, though I've never had to have sex with anyone. This is totally voluntary," Bill said.

"Do you want to fuck me?" Richie asked wryly.

"I would rather not, to be honest," Bill said, looking away.

"So you'd, what, be taking one for the team?" Richie said, amused.

"That would be one way to say it, but as my client I do want to keep your best interest in mind," Bill said,

"I dont know about this. Do you really think it would help?" Richie asked..

"There's no guarantee, but it has helped past clients," Bill stated, uncrossing his legs.

"I guess I'd be open to trying it. But I can't promise anything," Richie said, getting out of the couch he was sitting on and removing a check from his pants pocket.

"Great. Go home and pack clothes, I'll come to pick you up in an hour," Bill said, turning away to continue packing up, and Richie placed the check on the desk before turning away and leaving the office.

As Richie walked to his car, he pondered what just happened, and what 'fulfilling his needs' would entail.

2. Cold Eyes

Notes for the Chapter:

Aka 'some shit about Bill's mantis eyes'. "Therapists don't take patients into cabin in the woods and fuck the shit out of them for breakfast lunch and dinner" - skatedaddy

I'm probably going to slow down updates by a day or something and release them on a schedule regardless of how much ive written so I don't take huge gaps to write chapters

"Did I really need to get tested?" Richie said, pouting as he stared out of the passenger side window, observing the infrastructure built around the Passaic river on his right.

"If you want me to help you, you have to follow my guidance. Besides, the last thing I want to do is get an std from my patient," Bill said, giggling slightly, and Richie looked at him, wondering if he always laughed like a teenage girl.

"Right, about that. Do you fuck all your patients?" Riche asked, a hint of a smirk on his face as Bill started choking on the coffee he was sipping.

"You okay?" Richie asked rhetorically, laughing at him as he coughed a couple times, clearing out his windpipe.

"I'm fine, and you know the answer to that question," Bill said, looking at Richie for a second, blue eyes somber, before turning back and taking another sip of coffee.

"I don't actually. You tell me that I need to come with you to some cabin upstate and then you say you want to have sex with me? Is this even legal?" Richie said, voice manic

"How many times do I have to say this is voluntary," Bill exasperatedly responded, sighing.

“Probably a couple more times,” Richie retorted.

“I don't believe that traditional psychology helps anyone, or at least it doesn't solve any problems. Environmental influences are disruptions when you're trying to understand the fears that influence your behavior, so being isolated is helpful to develop a daily routine that can encourage positive personal growth,” Bill said, voice strangely upbeat despite how gravely monotone it was,

“Damn, lighten up,” Richie said, laughing at how serious Bill had sounded. Bill simply nodded, taking a sip and shaking the paper cup when he realized it was empty.

“Shit, I forgot to eat,” Richie said, suddenly realizing his stomach was growling loudly. *I probably shouldn't have finished all my coke*, Richie thought, pouting slightly.

“What food do you eat?” Bill asked, looking to his left as he stopped at a traffic light.

“Pancakes,” Richie said, wincing at a sharp pain in his stomach.

“It's one in the afternoon,” Bill protested, looking at his phone.

“*Pancakes*,” Richie insisted. “There's an iHop up ahead!”

Bill tried to think of a reason to protest, but caved in and pulled into the parking lot, mostly empty save for a few scattered out of state vehicles.

“C'mon, how can you hate pancakes?” Richie asked mockingly as they got out of the car.

“I'm an adult,” Bill said, leading the way into the diner. As they passed the doorway a waitress greeted them with a smile, and Bill frowned, turned to Richie with a disgusted look.

“Table for two,” Richie said, grinning, and mock-led Bill to their table.

“What can I get you to drink?” The waitress asked, her warm smile a sharp contrast to Bill, who looked sick to his stomach.

“Coffee,” Bill said curtly, picking up the menu in front of him and scanning it.

“Can I have a large chocolate milkshake and a coffee, too?” Richie asked, and Bill winced from behind his menu.

“Sure thing, sweetheart,” the waitress said, turning to leave.

“Can I get a water, too?” Bill asked, and the waitress turned her head.

“Sure, hon,” she said, turning back and beginning to pour their coffees once she was behind the bar.

“Why so much sweet food?” Bill said, closing his menu and setting it down at the end of the table.

“I have a metabolism like a fucking hummingbird, got to eat sugar to not look like a skeleton,” Richie said, taking the cup of coffee the waitress had handed him and proceeding to put six packets of half in half in it. Bill winced again.

“Why don't you like sugar?” Richie asked, taking a large sip of his coffee.

“I like sugar, I'm just a vegan,” Bill replied, taking a sip of black coffee before tearing open a sugar packet and stirring it in.

“Damn, dude, why?” Richie said, astonished that anyone wouldn't want to eat meat.

“I just think that you don't need animal products in food for it to taste good,” Bill droned, his voice curiously devoid of any emotion.

“But why?” Richie asked, tilting his head to the right.

“Why do you act like a child?” Bill said absentmindedly, and then closed his mouth, eyes wide and a shocked look on his face.

“Excuse me, what?” Richie said, his voice growing louder with each word.

“I'm sorry, I may have not slept last night,” Bill responded

exasperatedly, his voice monotone once again.

“You think that's enough of an apology?” Richie replied, growing more irritated by the second.

“Here's your milkshake, honey,” the waitress said, and Richie turned to face her. She set it down on the table in front of him.

“It's not my place to judge,” Bill said softly, gulping down half of the glass of water while Richie began to drink his milkshake.

“It's okay, I guess my childhood is an important thing to talk about,” Richie said, continuing to drink the milkshake.

“Not here, but you're right,” Bill replied, taking another sip of coffee.

“Are you two ready to order?” the waitress said, and they both looked at each other at the same time.

“Sure,” Bill said, looking up at her. “I'll have two house salads without tomatoes with raspberry vinaigrette and four orders of hash browns.”

“Sounds good,” the waitress said, taking down the order before turning to Richie. “And for you?”

“I'll have three chocolate chip pancakes with strawberries on top and a side of bacon and hash browns,” Richie said, folding up the menu and handing it to the waitress, who thanked them and left.

“Four orders of hash browns?” Richie said, skeptically eying Bill with amusement.

“About the only unhealthy food I can eat,” Bill said, smiling for a moment before looking down.

The two sat in awkward silence for a bit, Richie fidgeting with his hoodie sleeve and Bill staring down, spaced out.

“How are you gonna fix me?” Richie asked, looking at Bill, and Bill looked up into his eyes, noticing for the first time that they're brown.

"There's no 'fixing' involved," Bill said, voice monotone but hardened. He put down his cup of coffee as he continued to speak, hands clenching into hardened fists. "I'll help you become aware of negative and distorted thoughts, recognize the beginnings of an emotional spiral, and rebuild your self-esteem, but there's nothing to fix. Modern psychology is bullshit, forcing people experiencing completely valid emotions to subjugate themselves to others' social constructions and let it grow toxic inside them-"

"Calm down," Richie warned, noticing Bill's behavior becoming aggressive.

Obviously this stuff is important to him, he thought as he put his hand on Bill's clenched fist.

Bill pulled his hand away almost immediately, as if Richie's hand had burned him.

"I'm sorry," Bill spoke through clenched teeth, taking a large sip of coffee.

"It's okay, man," Richie said, though he had to force himself to keep from blushing.

Why did he recoil from me so fast? Richie wondered, taking another sip of his milkshake.

"Here's your salads," the waitress said, interrupting both's train of thought.

"Thank you," Bill said coldly, moving his almost empty coffee and water to the side.

"The rest will be out soon," the waitress said to Richie, turning and walking away.

Richie watched as Bill snarfed down both plates of lettuce, barely stopping to finish off the glass of water before continuing to eat. When he finished, he stacked them together and finished his coffee.

"So... you really like vegetables, huh?" Richie smirked, barely containing howling laughter.

“Do you not eat vegetables every day?” Bill snapped, burping, and Richie hoped to god he didn't laugh.

“Not when I can avoid it,” Richie said, turning to grin with childlike delight when the waitress set down his plate of food, topped off with butter and strawberries.

“Here are your hash browns,” she said, setting all four plates down and collecting the stacked dishes.

“I'll be back with more coffee,” she said before walking away.

Richie munched gratefully on a piece of bacon as Bill started to resume shoveling his food down.

“Damn dude, slow down,” Richie said, cutting out a slice of pancake and shoving it in his mouth.

“I'm really hungry,” Bill said inbetween bites, voice slurred.

“Yeah, but... damn,” Richie said, continuing to eat his pancakes in bliss.

“You ever been up for 24 solid hours with only coffee and saltine crackers? I fucking hate saltine crackers,” Bill said, his voice warmer than Richie had heard before.

Probably the food, Richie thought, spearing a hash brown with his fork and munching on it thoughtfully.

“Yeah, me too,” Richie said absentmindedly.

After finishing his last hash brown, Bill stacked the plates together, leaning back in the booth and sighing.

“It should be another hour until we get there, so if you want to take a nap, now would be the time. It's going to take some time to set up,” Bill said, thanking the waitress as she poured more coffee into his cup.

“Set up what?” Richie looked up from his food, confused.

"You can't just live in a house in the middle of the woods without heat and food," Bill said, a hint of a smirk on his face. "First I'll teach you how to split logs, and then we'll go shopping."

Richie's face paled.

"Splitting logs? Look at me, I couldn't split a carrot!" Richie protested, surprised that physical labor would be a part of his therapy.

"It's more about centering yourself," Bill said, finishing up his coffee and motioning to the waitress for a check.

"You about ready?" Bill asked, looking at Richie's plate, now an indecipherable mess.

"Yeah, just need to go to the bathroom," Richie said, getting out of his booth and walking to the back of the diner.

When he shut the door behind him, he began to hyperventilate. Richie looked in the mirror, observing his pale face outlined by medium-length shaggy light brown hair.

I can't do this I can't do this I'll hurt him I'll fail I'll- an image of someone above him shoving his foot into his face came into his mind, and he ignored the feeling, turning on the faucet and splashing water in his face.

Shut up, Tozier, you can do this, Richie convinced himself, drying his hands and exiting the restroom, forcing himself to smile as he came into Bill's sight.

"Ready?" Bill asked, and Richie nodded, his smile faltering. Bill led Richie out the door.

"Time for me to hibernate," Richie said as they reached the car and got in. Leaning back in his seat, Richie turned his head to the right and looked out the window, hiding the sadness in his face from Bill as he drifted to sleep.

3. First Bite

Notes for the Chapter:

“Oh I thought he got diddled by his grandpa. That's why his grandfather had all those secret passages built in the family mansion” -skatedaddy

Next chapter (3 days ish) is gonna be a sex scene, obvious warnings for that. Thank god richie didn't get diddled

When Richie woke up, the car was parked in a gravel driveway and Bill was unpacking things from the trunk.

Richie yawned, stretching in his seat before opening the door and getting out of the car.

“What time is it?” Richie asked, staring at Bill, who was holding two large suitcases that Richie had brought.

“3 ish,” Bill grunted, walking through the open door into a medium-sized wooden cabin.

“Huh,” Richie said, turning to search the trunk of the car for anything he could bring inside. He grabbed what looked like Bill's clothes bag and two cases of beer, the last things in there, before shutting the trunk and walking inside.

“Holy shit,” Richie said, eyes wide in awe. The cabin was larger on the inside than it seemed on the outside due to the high ceiling. Two ceiling fans sandwiched a large metal chandelier outfitted with candles that seemed to be temporarily suspended, the top of the chandelier attached to a chain rope that was clipped in up above.

“It's okay, but it gets kind of hot in here because you can't leave the windows open for too long,” Bill said, grabbing the beers Richie was holding and setting them on a counter that served as the barrier between the living room and the kitchen.

“Your room is past the living room, by the bathroom,” Bill said,

opening one of the beer cases, a paper box with the words 'Resin' written on them, and put a couple beers in the fridge.

"This is really nice," Richie responded. "Which room?"

"Left one," Bill said, grabbing his bags and throwing them up onto the loft space in the living room.

"Are you across from me?" Richie asked as he walked into the room, noting its hardwood walls and floors. He sat on the bed, taking off his shoes and laying on it.

"No," Richie heard Bill say as he closed his eyes and breathed in the crisp air.

This is nicer than I thought it would be, Richie thought, opening his eyes and walking back out into the living room.

"Where are you?" Richie asked, not seeing Bill anywhere.

"Up here," Richie heard a voice to the left of him and turned to see that a ladder had been built into the wall. He walked over and looked up, seeing the sky.

Richie climbed up the ladder and for a second saw Bill smile. It was a sad one, but Richie smiled and had to bite his lip to stop from blushing at how beautiful Bill looked in that one moment. Then he turned to Richie and frowned.

"This is where I sleep," Bill said, voice monotone, and Richie frowned as well.

"This is really cool," Richie muttered, and Bill nodded.

"Sometimes birds shit on the glass but it's pretty nice," Bill said, and Richie realized he was making a joke.

"Put your clothes away, we'll start getting wood in a half an hour," Bill said, and Richie nodded, laughing on the inside about the double entendre.

Richie climbed down the ladder, still thinking about his therapist's

smile, and began to put his suitcases away, while Bill rested his eyes.

Bill wasn't completely sure what to make of Richie yet. He had only met the man hours before, and he was having trouble seeing what motivated Richie's actions. His patient certainly didn't act like he had described himself being around him.

Furthermore, Bill wasn't sure what effect Richie could have on him if he didn't take to the regimen and force Bill to alter his habits to become unhealthy.

Bill sighed, trying to push the thoughts out of his head and fall asleep.

Elsewhere, Richie was putting a vibrator in his sock drawer.

Just in case, he thought as he covered it in socks. Finished putting away his clothing, he tossed his suitcases on a ramshackle pile on the floor and flopped onto the bed, closing his eyes and yawning.

Both slept, and dreamed of the same thing.

In their dream, an orchid mantis is hunting for a meal on a clear summer day. It walks for several feet before a butterfly comes by, a pipevine swallowtail with five bright orange orbs on its wings, seeming to say 'eat me'.

The mantis is hesitant at first, but the butterfly lands in front of the mantis. The mantis strikes, sinking its claws in the butterfly's wings, restraining it before beginning to eat its face. It chews for a few seconds, then notices something is wrong. It falls to the ground, writhes for a moment, and then stops moving.

Bill woke up, his forehead drenched in sweat and confused as to where he was.

That was interesting, Bill thought, pulling his sheets off and sliding down the ladder into the living room.

After getting a glass of water, Bill walked up to the door of Richie's room and knocked.

“Huh?” Richie said, abruptly awaking and swearing under his breath.

“Ready to chop some wood and tend a fire?” Bill asked, and Richie grumbled in response, getting out of bed and throwing on a t shirt with a cat on it.

“You'll probably want something warmer,” Bill advised as Richie opened the door, seeing Bill in a black parka and winter gloves.

Richie turned around, grabbing a hoodie off the rack and putting it over him.

“Better?” Richie said, disgruntled, and Bill turned to leave.

Richie followed Bill through the living room and outside to the high side of the house where about 300 logs of wood were stacked against the wall.

“I always get leftovers from my old neighbors,” Bill explained, grabbing a log and the long handled ax that lay against the cabin.

“This is how you chop a log of wood,” Bill said, placing the log on the base of a tree trunk and moving away from it.

“You always want to keep your body out of the way. You stand sideways, like this,” Bill said, getting in position. “Then you just hold the middle of the handle and just chop.”

Bill swung the ax, splitting the log in half and embedding itself in the tree stump. Richie was both impressed with how strong Bill was and anxious about trying it himself.

“Come on, I'll help you get in position,” Bill said, reaching out and grabbing Richie's hand and lightly pulling him towards the stump.

“Your left leg forward,” Bill said, trying to position Richie in the right way while Richie tried not to blush as Bill grabbed his waist and turned his hips to face the right direction.

“And then just swing it,” Bill said, and Richie followed through, heaving the blade down at the log. The log split but the blade and wedge were still embedded. Bill gave him a reassuring smile (or, at

least, his version of an everyday smile) and grabbed the handle, lifting both the ax and the log and dropping them down, splitting it fully.

“Keep doing this for a half an hour, I'm going to pick up groceries. You like stew?” Bill asked, walking towards the car and getting in.

“Don't forget to focus on the center of the log,” Bill shouted as he turned the car on and pulled out, leaving Richie alone in the middle of the woods.

This is bullshit, Richie thought, lining his body up the way Bill had showed him and thinking about how it had felt when Bill had touched him. Richie swung the ax down, splitting the half-log into two quarters and lodging itself in the stump below.

Richie swore under his breath, leaning down to pull the handle of the ax, but it wouldn't budge. Richie pulled again, moving the ax handle up and down to no avail.

“What the fuck,” Richie muttered, wiggling the handle back and forth. No luck. He swore, kicking the ax handle before noticing what was wrong. The eye of the blade was embedded deep in the tree stump, a hairline fracture running through the wood.

“What the fuck!” Richie repeated, exasperatedly running a hand through his hair.

How can you do anything if you can't chop wood right, Richie thought, and dismissed it as intrusive.

What if they're right? You stupid piece of shit, you don't deserve therapy, you garbage.

Breathing heavily, Richie dropped to his knees in front of the still-stuck axe, a tear running down his cheek as he fell to his side in a fetal position, hyperventilating and light-headed, praying to pass out.

Five miles away, Bill had pulled over to buy fresh vegetables and eggs from a local farm stand. Thanking the farm's owner, he walked over to his car, resting the carton of eggs and spinach on top of the car and unlocking it.

Bill wondered how far Richie had gotten. It was only four, but the sky would turn to dusk soon and Bill hoped they had enough tinder wood to heat the house.

Placing the food supplies on the passenger seat, Bill buckled up and turned the car on, pulling out onto the street and heading home. It was overcast, clouds looming wearily overhead, and Bill hoped it wouldn't rain tomorrow.

When Bill pulled into the driveway, he couldn't see Richie.

Perhaps he gave up, Bill thought, getting out of the car, and immediately saw Richie, slumped over in a heap on the ground and hyperventilating. He rushed over to Richie, curled up in a ball, and lifted him up. Richie went limp for a second before realizing what was happening, pushing his legs out and almost making Bill lose balance.

Bill swore as he brought Richie inside, leaving the mudroom door open, a draft of cold air entering the stuffy space. He gently lowered a shaking Richie onto the couch, and he coughed sharply as he began to breathe in the warm air.

Bill shut the door, turning to look at his patient, color returning to his pale face.

"I'm s-sorry," Richie sniffled, calming down slightly. "I can't do it."

Bill smiled at him, a genuine one this time, and walked over to his patient.

"Are you okay?" Bill said, voice strangely reassuring, sitting down by the end of the couch and placing a hand on Richie's shoulder.

"I just- I can't do it, I can't-" Richie repeated.

"As long as you're okay, it doesn't matter," Bill said, cutting him off. "I'm going to bring in some firewood. Just wait here, try to get some rest."

As Bill got up and walked outside, Richie whispered a thank you and closed his eyes, mind replaying the moment Bill picked him up over

and over.

A few minutes later the door opened again, Bill standing in the doorway with a bundle of wood in each hand. Richie watched as Bill set up the wood burning oven, lighting a fire under skinny sticks and feeding it the larger ones. Richie closed his eyes as Bill turned to face him.

“Hungry?” he asked rhetorically, turning back and walking outside to bring in groceries.

“It’ll take a while, feel free to go back to sleep,” Bill said as he walked back inside, carrying a few bags. He began to prepare vegetables, and Richie craned his neck, looking at his therapist. He was still embarrassed by what happened, but Bill seemed to be okay, focusing on chopping carrots.

Richie adjusted his neck to a more comfortable position, eyes fluttering closed and falling asleep to the faint sound of Bill’s chopping.

An hour later, Richie yawned awake, looking up at the ceiling of the cabin and for a second forgetting where he was. It had turned to dusk outside, and Richie could see the sun hanging low through the mudroom window.

Remembering what had happened, he jolted awake, looking back and forth for any signs of Bill. It was warm, embers burning in the oven, and

“Are you doing better?” Richie heard, and turned to look over by the bedrooms. Bill was exiting the room opposite his, and he shut the door as Richie sat down on the couch, his right hand clenching into a fist.

“No,” Richie said, looking at the floor, cheeks red. “I couldn’t even chop wood.”

“You’ve got to start somewhere,” Bill said, remembering how deeply embedded the blade was in the wood.

“I don’t know if I can do this,” Richie said, turning to Bill. “What if

I'm doomed to stay the same person forever.”

“Not if you don't want to be that person anymore,” Bill said, giving Richie and awkward thumbs up. Richie smiled, and Bill turned away, walking over to the kitchen to check on the soup. When he turned around, Richie was in front of him, a look of passion in his eyes, leaning towards Bill, mouth open.

“Not outside the bedroom,” Bill said coldly, pushing Richie away.

“You're the one who said you would 'fulfill my needs',” Richie said angrily, pouting a bit as he looked into Bill's eyes, cold as when he first saw him.

“If this is going to work in any way, you need to see me as a separate person from the person that 'fulfills your needs',” Bill replied, pointing to the bedroom he had come out of a moment before.

“In there, just think of me as a human dildo,” Bill said, and Richie snorted, forcing himself to not laugh his ass off.

“Fine,” Richie said insistently, pushing Bill towards the room. “As long as I don't leave that room still able to walk.”

Bill blushed and turned around, leading Richie through the doorway. The room had a single window open, letting the cool night breeze in, and a queen sized bed with dark maroon sheets and pillows.

Richie pushed Bill onto the bed, leaning down and pulling Bill into a passionate kiss.